

RUFFED GROUSE

Bonasa umbellus Order: Galliformes
Family: Phasianidae



Distribution Western U.S.

Found in deciduous habitats west of the Cascade divide in Washington, Oregon, and in extreme northwest California south to Humboldt and western Trinity Counties; also east of the Cascades in northeast and southeast Washington and northwest Oregon. Occurs throughout north central, and

southeast Idaho; west and south-central Montana; northwest Wyoming; and northeast and central Utah. Several recent records from extreme northwest Colorado. Disjunct populations occur in Elko and Humboldt Counties in northern Nevada, Turtle Mtns. and Pembina Hills in northern North Dakota, Black Hills of western South Dakota, and adjacent portions of eastern Wyoming.

Distribution in Nevada: There are no verifiable records of ruffed grouse in Nevada prior to 1963; hence the species is assumed to be non-native in Nevada. The Nevada Atlas of Breeding Birds in Nevada shows confirmed breeding populations in the Jarbidge Mountains, the Ruby Mountains, and the Schell Creek Range. A population in the Santa Rosa Range was recorded but not confirmed as breeding.

Note: Ruffed grouse have not been released into the Schell Creek Range, and sightings have not been confirmed by NDOW and could be mistaken identity.

Habitat: Habitat selection by ruffed grouse is not random. Aspen and aspen/conifer stands with scattered clearings are preferred habitat in the Western US. In southeast Idaho seasonal and breeding habitats are characterized by relatively open tree cover of small diameter aspen, characteristic of early seral aspen communities. Habitats with these characteristics provided habitat for breeding, brood rearing, cover and foraging. Drumming sites are characterized by a high density of small-stemmed aspens and shrubs 3 to 6 meters tall. Broods occupied more open habitat with high cover of herbaceous vegetation. Habitats most frequently occupied during autumn were more diverse and had a higher density of small stems (saplings).

Migration: Ruffed grouse are year-round residents throughout their range. Seasonal differences in movements, home range, and habitat use occur.



Identification: Medium-sized grouse with crested head and scaled brown upperparts. White underparts have pale brown bars on breast and dark brown bars on belly and flanks. Sides of neck have black ruff. The tail is brown with fine, white bars and white-edged dark band at tip. Northern form is grayer.

The ruffs are on the sides of the neck in both sexes. They also have a crest on top of their head, which sometimes lies flat. Both sexes are similarly marked and sized, making them difficult to tell apart, even in hand. The female often has a broken subterminal tail band, while males often have unbroken tail bands. Another fairly accurate sign is that rump feathers with a single white dot indicate a female; rump feathers with more than one white dot indicate a male.

Breeding and Nesting: In spring, males attract females by drumming, beating their wings loudly, often while on a fallen log. Clutches of 8 to 14 buff eggs, sometimes with brown spots, are laid in a shallow depression lined with leaves and concealed under a bush. Incubation period ranges from 21 to 28 days and is carried out by the female.

Foraging and Feeding: The ability of ruffed grouse to thrive on a wide range of foods has allowed it to adapt to a wide and varied range of habitats in North America. Feeds on forbs, fruits, and insects; but eats mostly buds and catkins of aspens. In Utah, the most important food items in the fall diet were rose hips, aspen leaves, and the fruit of meadow rue (*Thalictrum fendleri*). Under the snow cover of winter in Utah, the only food items identified were buds and twigs of aspen and chokecherry. Willow, serviceberry, and mountain mahogany were included in the winter diet where they were available.

The Ruffed Grouse Society is a non profit organization dedicated exclusively to creation and maintenance of young-forest habitat, which is essential for the survival of the species as well as other wildlife, such as songbirds.